

Testimony of
Gregory J. Baracy, Ed.D., Superintendent
Wayne-Westland Community Schools
Senate Reforms – Restructuring & Reinventing
November 2, 2011

“Good morning, my name is Greg Baracy, and I am the Superintendent of the Wayne-Westland Community School District. I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 4059 and commend you for seeking input from the educational community. We support this Bill!

HB 4059 is another desperately needed reform initiative. As school districts throughout the state struggle to find ways out of deficit, they can no longer afford the luxury of paying for salaries and benefits of union officials using taxpayer funds.

In our district, the net cost of the president of the teachers’ union paid by the taxpayers is over \$105,000. In two districts contiguous to us, the cost of union officials is over \$250,000. That brings the grand total for these three districts alone, to over \$350,000 for local teacher union officials.

For example . . .

This cost of \$350,000 equates to:

5 classroom teachers.

or

4 to 5 school busses.

or

292 new classroom computers.

or

159 interactive classroom Smart Boards.

or

7,000 new textbooks . . . just to mention a few.

The point is, there are no easy solutions to save money for student programs and Districts continue to make severe cuts. This savings would be realized immediately.

The prohibition on paid release time, including salaries and benefits by a public employer, as outlined in HB 4059, is timely and appropriate. When teacher union officials are acting as labor representatives, their salaries should be paid for by the labor organization. This makes sense and is a way to put precious financial resources back into the classroom.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars throughout the state could be redirected back into educational programs at no additional expense to the taxpayer.

Additionally, the Michigan Education Association, in our case, provides a Uni-Serve Director that is assigned full time to the Wayne-Westland Community School district. This Uni-Serve Director handles labor issues and negotiations at the local level, making local release time, paid salaries and benefits an unnecessary duplication of services.

Our local association president, as in many other districts, has no assigned contact with students and no instructional responsibilities. In fact, this person's office is located in a MEA office complex outside of our district boundaries.

The cost of our union president's salary and benefits could be easily borne by the association's membership. The Association/MEA annual dues paid by a Wayne-Westland teacher is \$910. Bringing the total annual dues paid by our 783 union members to \$712,000 a year (783 x \$910).

As you probably know, in the Fall of 2008, my district was the target of the first illegal teacher strike, outside of Detroit Public Schools, since the 1994 revision to Michigan's Public Employment Relations Act. And yes, our teachers lead by the union leadership walked out - officially going on an illegal strike, in the early morning hours leaving 4,000 of our high-school students stranded at our high schools unsupervised, in harms way, and with our school campuses in total chaos. A total of 13,000 students were affected. The illegal strike lasted 4 days and the courts ordered the teachers to return to work with no discipline or consequence for breaking the law.

This illegal strike disrupted the community and the district for many months thereafter.

As you can see from the attached quote made by our teacher's union president in the "MEA Voice", the district and taxpayers paid the union president to plan this illegal strike for over two years prior to their walk-out.

It is important to note that the illegal strikers were not financially penalized for their actions. In fact, they benefited by being paid their per diem rate by the NEA/MEA which totaled over \$1 million. If the union can pay over \$1 million to their membership to engage in an illegal strike, the union should be able to pay the local association representatives salary and benefits.

The issue behind the illegal strike was the union owned MESSA insurance and the union's refusal to accept a comparable benefit package at a much lower cost to the district.

The cost savings that Wayne-Westland could have realized if the district was able to successfully negotiate a comparable health insurance package at that time, would have been approximately \$3.8 million over a 3 year contract. This savings would have been enough to help the district through another year without serious cutbacks and increasing class size.

Last year our teachers' MESSA rates increased 17% on a \$10 million base, which is a \$1.7 million increase. At the same time, our comparable PPO for administrators and support staff only increased 3%.

In closing, we can't sustain the system that is in place today. HB 4059 and other reform initiatives make sense and can provide additional resources for children and classrooms now, without sacrifice to school employees.

Further, these reforms would help expedite negotiations, level the playing field at the bargaining table, and would be less disruptive to the educational process. Both parties would be more accountable and transparent to the public and taxpayers.

Educating our children is serious business and it requires courageous and bold action during these extraordinary times. I urge you to do what's necessary to redirect our precious resources back to the classroom. Prohibit

the use of taxpayer dollars for paying the salary and benefits of union officials and other non-educational purposes; such as the illegal teacher strike I cited earlier, and pass HB 4059.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to be with you today, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Our "Mighty MEA" has reached an interesting intersection where the compass is pointing in a variety of directions. They are: 1) a need to build positive working relationships with our Lansing law makers, 2) Examine our MEA budget under a wide-eyed microscope that is fair and equitable to all MEA members and MEA staff, 3) to grow our new teacher membership and connect with them via their avenue in the use of best technology practices.

One of our ideas on pump starting our connecting with our law makers is to extend an invitation to spend a day attending then neighborhood public school. Their day would begin by riding the school bus, observing teachers & support staff working with students and of course enjoying a healthy hot lunch with our students.

The upcoming MEA Spring Representative Assembly will allow the opportunity for our delegates to elect new officers. Richard Fink and I have a combined total of 73 years of teaching experience. We invite you to join the Fink/ Carter team. Together we will keep our MEA strong as we advocate for public education. Many Thanks for all you do for your students!

Sincerely, Linda S. Carter—Candidate for MEA vice president

Nancy Strachan



Nancy Strachan, a teacher, is president of the Wayne-Westland Education Association (WWEA), a post she's held for seven years. As WWEA president, she joined her colleagues in 2008 in the first major work stoppage in a Michigan public school district outside of Detroit since 1994. Strachan has served on the MEA Board of Directors since 2004 and has also held various other appointments at the local and state levels. She earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Eastern Michigan University.

I'm Nancy Strachan, proud president of the Wayne-Westland Education Association, a position I've held for seven years. I am a candidate for MEA vice president with Steve Cook.

As a long time local president, I believe the strength of our state association lies at the very essence of our locals, their ability to represent members and their ability to bargain good contracts. MEA is only as strong as its locals—if our locals don't have the tools and resources to do the job—MEA isn't getting the job done and the financial ability of MEA to do its job is in jeopardy.

We need the most experienced team at the helm of the MEA—experienced with our finances, experienced with our pension fund, experienced with our budget, experienced with issues our members confront on a daily basis; we need experienced leaders in the Executive Office.

It was a sense of commitment to members and leadership that led to my successfully taking the Wayne Westland EA out on a

strike two years ago—the first and only MEA strike since passage of PA 112—it took almost two years of careful planning before that strike even began.

Yes, I'm a tough leader, but most important I've demonstrated an ability to make things happen in tough times.

Steve Cook and Nancy Strachan are a team of experienced leaders ready to start on day one and begin to tackle the substantial challenges that face MEA. We're ready to make a difference and welcome your comments, questions, encouragement, and support.

Thank you

Candidates for secretary-treasurer

Lance Little



Lance Little, a teacher in Owosso, is an active union member. He is treasurer of the Owosso Education Association and has served on the MEA Board of Directors since 2004, in addition to holding several other elected and appointive offices at the state and local levels. Little has also

served as a delegate to the MEA and NEA assemblies. Little earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan and a master's degree from Michigan State University.

Dear Fellow MEA Members:

My name is Lance Little and I am seeking election as your MEA secretary-treasurer.

I have served you on the MEA Board of Directors since 2004, and I have served on and chaired a number of MEA statewide committees. Through these responsibilities, I have developed an understanding of MEA's operation and finances. These experiences, as well as my role as a local leader and political advocate, have prepared me to be an active, integral part of the MEA leadership team that will move MEA into the future.

In the development of the MEA Budget, it is important that members recognize and value the services and benefits they get for their dues. There must be input from local leaders and members and the budget process must be transparent so RA delegates have confidence in the budget. MEA must continuously evaluate our organizational structure and efficiently deliver our programs and services to members.

Strong local associations make a strong MEA. Local associations are strengthened when members are trained in skills that prepare and enhance their effectiveness as local leaders and bargainers. I hope to make training more accessible to local leaders in all parts of the state, including online opportunities.

MEA finds itself in difficult times -- fighting the anti-public school and anti-union rhetoric that threatens collective

Top officers of MEA take a leave of absence from their regular job to serve full-time in their official role